

Fresh evidence (Luke 24:36b-48)

## **The risen Jesus' first witnesses didn't just give their testimony in words. Many of them eventually offered evidence written in their own blood.**

by [Kristen Barger Grant](#) in the [April 19, 2003](#) issue

When I was in kindergarten, one of my favorite activities was “What’s in the box?” The teacher cut a hand-sized hole in a box and placed a mystery object inside. You could reach in the box, smell the box, shake the box—everything but open the box. Each one of us would take a turn with the box and share what we discovered with the class. We tried to guess the right answer. “It’s kind of fuzzy.” “Is it a teddy bear?” “It feels like a ball, but it’s pointy on the side.” “Is it a football?”

We thought it was just a game, but our teacher was trying to show us how to explore the world, how to ask the right questions, put together clues, hold back wild guesses and be patient, waiting for the right conclusion to emerge.

Jesus uses a similar pedagogy as he leads the disciples into exploring the post-Easter world. They are somewhat less eager pupils than my kindergarten class. For one thing, they are terrified. For another, they are pretty sure that they already know what they are seeing. After all, there are only two ways to explain why this man who looks like Jesus is standing before them. One is that Jesus hadn’t died after all. But as much as they wanted to believe that, they knew it couldn’t be true. They had seen the cross, the body, the sealed tomb. They had all the evidence they needed, and there was only one other conclusion. This was a ghost, and ghosts are not generally signs of good news.

But Jesus gently coaxes them to a third, unconsidered, incomprehensible conclusion. He doesn’t explain resurrection, but instead encourages them to discover it for themselves. “Look at my hands and feet, where I was nailed to the wood. Yes, that’s right. I did die. A ghost? Are you sure? Touch me. Is that what a ghost feels like?

Give me some fish. Do apparitions chew and swallow? It is I. I know you don't understand it; I know you can't believe it, but go ahead. Take a guess at what God has done."

Luke tells us that the disciples "in their joy . . . were still disbelieving and still wondering." They wanted to give in to the hope that was jumping around in their bellies; they wanted to raise their hand and say, "Is it Jesus? It is; it's Jesus!" But they were so very, very afraid of getting this answer wrong. So Jesus gives them some more clues. He begins again to tell the story of God's plan to restore all of creation, from the covenant with Abraham to the exodus from Egypt, from Ezekiel's valley of dry bones to Isaiah's suffering servant. He's told them all this before, of course, but this time, in the presence of their risen Lord, the doors in the minds of the disciples are unlocked. The rejection, the suffering, the crucifixion—they weren't a detour from God's plan after all, but the final steps of God's long journey down into the plight of broken humanity. Now they are witnesses to the first steps on the other side. Not a dead man, not a ghost, but the victory of God!

And that is the role that Jesus gives to the disciples and to us in this story—we are to be witnesses. Not expert witnesses, just witnesses—people who tell the truth about what they have experienced. Throughout this Easter season, we hear some of the earliest of these testimonies: "I touched him, and he was not a ghost." "I saw the marks in his hands and feet; he was the crucified one." "We broke bread with him, and he ate." Two thousand years later, we can still give evidence of how the risen Jesus has come into our lives and retold the story of our lives in a way that opened our minds to the truth.

But those first witnesses didn't just give their testimony in words. Many of the people who saw the resurrected Jesus that day eventually offered evidence that was written in their own blood. The word translated as "witness" is *martyrs*.

Some scholars rush to point out that this meaning was a "later development," that Jesus did not intend that all his witnesses should become martyrs in the technical sense. Fair enough. But the church that grew from the blood of those martyrs knew what it was talking about. To be a Christian witness is not simply to repeat what you have heard. It is to give your whole life as evidence of the truth. Belief in the resurrected Lord can't be argued or explained into someone. Even Jesus didn't try that. He knew that the truth had to be seen, had to be touched, had to be experienced in his own flesh and in the living, and if necessary dying, witness of his

disciples.

We are witnesses when we can invite someone to look into our homes, our families, our friendships, our work, our checkbook, our daytimer—and find Jesus there. We are witnesses when we allow ourselves to be touched by folks who are lost and afraid. We are witnesses when we live in a way that defies any explanation other than the presence of the risen Christ within us. Look, touch, see, believe! It isn't a ghost. It's the living God.